

Run It Up The Flagpole

by Jeff Strite

2 Kings 13:14-13:19

(Props: 3 arrows)

OPEN: Yesterday was January 2nd. Does anyone know what national holiday that is?

It's called "Run It Up The Flagpole and See Who Salutes Day."

Yes... that's actually a special day on the January calendar.

I visited a couple of sites that spoke about this "special day" and this is what I read:

"(Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes) was a catchphrase which became popular in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It means 'to ... present an idea and see whether it receives a favorable reaction.'" Wikipedia

And www.HolidayInsights.com said that "(The purpose of the day is to challenge you set this day) aside... to do just that. Be creative today. Use this day to try and test new ideas and concepts."

In short, the idea is to believe in yourself enough to PLAN something. VISUALIZE something bigger than you are. And then DO that something... make it HAPPEN!

Now how many of you have NEVER heard of this holiday? (Me neither). Somebody ran this up the flagpole... and nobody saluted it.

And I got to wondering why this holiday never caught on.

Maybe it's because the "name" of this holiday is sounds so trivial.

Maybe it's because it just sounds like another "feel good", "believe in yourself" tripe.

Or maybe it's because a lot of people don't believe in themselves to begin with.

But now here's the deal... God DOES believe in you.

Ephesians 2:10 says "... we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance, for us to do."

God believes in you.

He believes so much in you that He has prepared things in advance for you to do.

So the question becomes, if God believes in you and me that much - if He believes so much in every Christian that believes, repents, confesses Jesus as their Lord and rises up out of the waters of baptism - that He has prepared things for us to do... why are so many Christians NOT doing all that much?

As I was thinking about this, an Old Testament story popped into my head (the one I used for our text this morning). In this story we have an Old Testament King named Jehoash who has an interesting conversation with Elisha. Elisha is on his death bed and Jehoash come to pay his respects to the prophet.

Elisha apparently has a soft spot in his heart for this king and he wants to give him a parting gift before he passes away. He tells the king to go get a bow and shoot an arrow out the window. And in the midst of this assignment Elisha puts his hands on those of the king – like a father might his child.

When Jehoash does shoots the arrow, Elisha says: “The LORD’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.” II Kings 13:17

Essentially Elisha is telling Jehoash – God has a plan for your life. And Jehoash had to do almost nothing to receive that blessing.

But notice what happens next: Then (Elisha) said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped.

The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times." II Kings 13:18-19

What’s going on here?

Elisha asked to strike the ground with the arrows! And almost immediately Elisha is angry in how Jehoash did what he did.

WHY?

ILLUS: At our preacher’s meeting, one of the preachers asked me: “How did you end up using this story for your sermon?”

Well, when I’ve read through the Bible certain stories have caught my attention... and this is one that so impressed me when I first read it that I began building part of my prayer life around it. But over the years I had messed up the story in my mind... I remembered it wrong. I remembered the story saying that Elisha asked the King to shoot arrows out the window, and that the King only shot 3 arrows. So, I’d often use this story as a prayer to God “I want to shoot all the arrows you give me.” And that made sense to me. If there are 10 arrows in the quiver, and I’m told to shoot arrows out the window... I’d want to shoot them all.

But... that’s NOT how the story goes. Elisha tells the king to shoot an arrow out the window and take the rest on strike the ground. And Elisha gets mad because the King doesn’t hit the ground more times.

But here’s the question: how many times did Elisha say to hit the ground with the arrows?

Elisha doesn't say.

How many times does the King hit the ground with the arrows?

3 times.

What's wrong with that?

You ask just about any Bible commentator and they'll all tell you 3 is a great number. It is used frequently in Scripture and it seems to be a number God really likes. So what's wrong with Jehoash hitting the ground 3 times with his arrows?

I don't really think the problem is with the 3 times he struck the ground.

I think the problem is with King Jehoash.

II Kings 13:10-11 tells us that "...Jehoash son of Jehoahaz became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he continued in them.

Jehoash is a wicked king.

He's just not nice.

He's not a "God" kind of guy.

Now he likes Elisha well enough.

He's come by to show his respect to a dying man.

He even pays him a compliment:

He cries: "My father! My father!"

He's essentially saying: "Elisha - you're the MAN."

Then he declares that Elisha is "The chariots and horsemen of Israel!"

In that statement he's recalling the time when Elisha delivered an entire enemy army into the hands of Israel all by himself. (II Kings 6:13-23)

But Jehoash - in his heart - just isn't a nice guy.

He's not into God.

He's come to pay his respects to Elisha, but... all this "God talk" is lost on him.

So Elisha asks him to shoot an arrow out the window and Jehoash basically says "Ok. Fine. Whatever!"

He's humoring the old man.

Elisha says: Jehoash, strike the ground."

Again: "Sure. Fine."

(I took the arrows and acted bored as I mimicked striking the ground with them).

There was no passion in his actions.

He was just going through the motions. He's playing the game.

He was kind of blowing this whole thing off as a waste of his time.

And Elisha gets angry.

Jehoash is doing what he always does.

Jehoash is over here... God's over there... and that's the way it's going to be all day long.

BUT because Jehoash is just going thru the motions – again - he's going to miss out on the full blessings God could have given him. He only strikes the ground 3 times – so 3 times his army will beat Aram. If he'd taken this seriously he'd have totally and finally defeated his enemy.

But that's not going to happen now.

A Godly king might have said to Elisha: "Tell me how many times to strike the ground. I want to make sure I do this right for God."

A Godly King would have been so sold out for God that he'd have wanted to do MORE than what God had asked.

There's an interesting verse in 2 Chronicles 16:9 that says:

"For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."

God's LOOKING for anyone who is FULLY committed to him!

God is looking throughout the WHOLE EARTH... trying to find someone like that.

And when He finds that person God commits to blessing them.

To strengthening them.

God is looking for that special someone who says

"I'm going to run this thing up the flagpole for God - because I KNOW who's going to salute."

It's not wishful thinking that drives a Godly person to do this.

It's a faith filled thinking that says:

"If God wants me to be fully committed to Him I only have one question - how many times CAN I take these arrows and strike the ground? Because I don't want to miss out on any of God's blessings in my life."

Now I want to go back to my original question:

If God believes so much in every Christian that He has prepared things in advance for us to do... why are so many Christians not doing all that much?

The only answer I can think of is this: they're not taking God seriously.

They think it doesn't really matter what they do because it's not going to change anything.

That's what they're thinking

AND that's what Jehoash was thinking
What difference does it make if I shoot an arrow out the window, or strike the ground? It's just a religious thing I have to do... so let's just get it done and move on.

A lot of this comes from how we've been raised.
Many people think about Christianity as coming to a church building and listening to a sermon, singing some songs, putting some money in the offering plate, taking communion, shaking a few hands... and then going home. And that's pretty much all they do for God.

They've hit the ground 3 times with their arrows... and that's it. Because that's what they've been raised to think Christianity is all about. And the sad thing is: Because that's ALL they do, they miss out on the blessings and power of God.

ILLUS: Jesus has a very unusual teaching in Luke 17. He said
"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'?

Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'?

Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? (Answer: NO!)
So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

If we only did we had to do: We are unworthy servants.

Or... another way of saying it: I only struck the ground 3 times with my arrows. I've done NOTHING beyond the minimum requirements I thought God wanted from me.

When I end up standing before God I really don't want to tell Him:
"I just did just what I had to do!"

Now let's be clear:

You cannot purchase your salvation by doing a bunch of good things.

And you cannot buy God's love by piling up good deed after good deed.

But if all you're doing is the minimum daily requirement of faith you've lost out!

You've robbed yourself!

There are blessings you COULD have had... but you don't have now.

"You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to DO GOOD WORKS that He prepared in advance for you to do."

So do those good works!

But now, what if I don't know what to do?
That's ok... do something!
Find something that needs to be done... and then do it.

DO NOT BE SATISFIED with Sunday morning worship!!!

Volunteer to babysit on Sunday mornings

- To be a part time Sunday School teacher
- To drive the bus once in a while
- To have a Bible Study in your house (you don't even have to teach it)
- To take part in the pantry ministry/clothing ministry/folding newsletters

Now, think about this:

What was the first thing Elisha asked Jehoash to do?

Just shoot an arrow out the window.

I could do that! I don't even have to hit anything, I just have to miss the window frame!

What's the 2nd thing Elisha asks him to do?

Just beat some arrows on the ground.

What? Do you need a Ph.D. to do something like that?

Of course not!

All the King had to do was do what he did - like he meant it. Like it mattered.

Get up, get out and **DO SOMETHING!!!**

ILLUS: I don't know how many of you know I got a new car (I smiled broadly for a moment because everybody knows about my new car. It's cherry red... well, I digress).

You know why I bought that new car?

Because I took my old van down to Mike (one of our mechanics in church) and he told me it would take more to fix the van than it worth. "Buy something new" he told me.

Do you know what was wrong with the old van? The power steering had gone out.

Now, how many of you have ever tried to drive a car with no power steering?

(Many hands went up)

Now, let me ask you a question, if you have a car with no power steering - which is easier to do: to turn the wheel when it's moving or when it's setting still?

Obviously, when it's moving.

The same is true for us... if we're just gonna sit there and wait for God to direct us where he wants us to go, that's not gonna happen. But if you're moving - if you're doing something for Him rather than just setting there - it's gonna be easier for

God to direct us where He wants us to go.

The point is this: Don't just sit there.

Don't just be satisfied with doing the minimum daily requirement for God.

Because if you do that, you'll lose out on the blessings God wants to give you.

Too many people just get by on what they think they HAVE to do to get by.

They're religion is more "I've GOT to do this" rather than "I GET to do this."

CLOSE: There was a man who was a field hand on a farm for an older couple. He lived in a bunkhouse attached to the barn and was paid a weekly wage. Every day he'd go out into the fields and tend to the livestock.

Every day he'd go past the aging barn with its paint fading and its barn door just hanging on.

He walked past the fences that needed mending and the weeds that had been allowed to overgrow the lanes. The farmhouse itself was in disrepair. The windows needed replacing and the siding needed attention.

But the field hand didn't concern himself too much with these things, because it wasn't his farm.

But then, one day, the old family called him into the parlor and sat him down for a talk. They told him how fond they were of him and how much it had meant to have him work for them all these years. But now they were getting on in age and they had no children. There was no one who was related to them for them to leave their farm to. So now, they were informing him that they were making him their heir. When they died, everything would be his.

He was deeply moved by their generosity and made sure they knew how grateful he was for all that they were promising him.

As he left the house, he looked around and started to really notice things. He saw how run down nature the barn had gotten. He looked at the fences, the lanes and of the house itself and he thought to himself "you know, I need to start fixing these things up."

What made the difference?

Well, now this was going to be HIS farm. He was now an heir to all he surveyed. It used to be that he'd go out and say "I've GOT to get these things done." Now, he looked at the farm and said "I GET to do these things." And he looked forward to making the improvements needed.

That's the difference between "get to" and "got to."

God has made us heirs with Jesus of a great Kingdom, and it's when we begin to realize the blessings that come from being an heir of God that we begin to take pride in what we're doing for the Kingdom.

But first you need to belong to Jesus Christ.

INVITATION